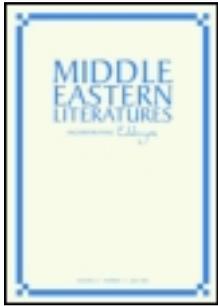


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Shawkat M. Toorawa

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The *Shifā' al-'Alī* of Āzād Bilgrāmī (d.1200/1786): Introducing an Eighteenth-century Indian Work on al-Mutanabbī's Poetry

SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA

Abstract

Arabic belletristic literature outside the time frame *c.*1500 to *c.*1800 is relatively unstudied and, in many cases, unknown; the same is true of Arabic belletristic literature outside Arabic-speaking lands. By presenting and describing the *Shifā' al-'alī* (1196/1782), this article endeavours to bring to light a work in which Ghulām 'Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī (d.1200/1786)—hailed in India as *Ḥassān-i Hind* for his superior panegyrics of the Prophet Muḥammad—engages with 180 of al-Mutanabbī's verses. Although he is relatively well known to Persianists and to historians of India, Āzād Bilgrāmī belongs also to Arabic literature, as his engagement and dialogue with al-Mutanabbī's poetry shows.

Arabic Literature and the 'Period of Decadence'

In 1999, it was possible for Robert Irwin to aver, in his splendid anthology of classical Arabic literature in translation, as follows:

...Although it is conceivable that the decline of Arabic literature in what European historians call the 'early modern period' is *more apparent than real*, there does appear to have been a decline both in quantity and quality of original writing in that period. We find no poet who can bear comparison with Mutanabbi (...)

In time *Arabic literature would revive*. That revival should be seen as *beginning in the late eighteenth century*....

(emphases added)¹

Evidently, the *'aṣr al-inḥiṭāt* (age of decline, period of decadence) remains a persistent category, a period when Arabic literature is said to have gone into decline after a golden age that can never be equalled. For some, the disintegration of 'Abbāsīd power marks the beginning of this decline;² for others, it is the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258;³ for yet others, it coincides with the ascendancy of the Ottomans (mid-fifteenth to early

Shawkat M. Toorawa, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Cornell University, 408 White Hall, Cornell, Ithaca, NY 14853, USA. E-mail: smt24@cornell.edu

sixteenth century). The end of the ‘age of decline’ is usually held to have been heralded by Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798, when European literature began to exert its (considerable) revivifying influence on Arabic, ushering in the *Nahḍa* (‘awakening’), and, by the end of the late nineteenth century, reversing the ‘decline’.⁴ No longer was Arabic literature lacking in originality, imitative, derivative, or needlessly ornate, and uncreatively focused on the production of commentaries and super-commentaries. As Devin Stewart has observed, ‘Implicit is the notion that authors of the classical period had said everything that needed saying, and had said it best’, leaving pre-moderns to quibble over inconsequential details, or merely to pass on the Arabo-Islamic cultural patrimony, ‘adding next to nothing of value’.⁵

The state of affairs is rapidly changing, however. The overwhelming majority of materials from the period 1517 to 1798—to adopt the narrowest range for the so-called ‘period of decadence’—are in manuscripts, but literary scholars and historians are increasingly devoting their efforts and energies to this material. In 1989, ‘Umar Mūsā Bāshā published *Tārīkh al-adab al-‘arabī: al-‘aṣr al-‘Uthmānī*.⁶ The multi-volume *Arabic literature of Africa* under the direction of John Hunwick and R. S. O’Fahey, begun in 1994, is an on-going project.⁷ In 2006, *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period* appeared, edited by Roger Allen and D. S. Richards.⁸ And later this year, *Essays in Arabic Biography, 1350–1850* will appear, edited by Joseph Lowry and Devin Stewart, one of several periodized volumes under the general editorship of Roger Allen.⁹ The latter forcefully takes up the notion of the *‘aṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ* and features many important Arabic littérateurs who have not hitherto figured in histories of Arabic literature. In particular, increasing attention is being paid to Arabic literature produced at the so-called margins.¹⁰

In their magisterial history of Arabic literature from 1800 to 1945, Boutros Hallaq, Heidi Toelle and their co-editors and contributors show an acute awareness of the need to understand better the period preceding the *Nahḍa*.¹¹ In her introductory remarks to an opening chapter titled ‘The State of Affairs in the Arab World at the end of the 18th century’, Hilary Kilpatrick briefly surveys the largely dismissive prevailing view of pre-modern Arabic literary output, and goes on to note:¹²

To begin with, let us point out that the geographical extent of Arabic literature in the 18th century does not correspond exactly to the borders of the modern Arab world. Thus, the Indian scholar, poet and historian, Āzād Bilgrāmī (1116/1704–1200/1786) left an extensive *diwān* and a short autobiography which he included in his biographical dictionary of the *‘ulamā’* in his lands.

The volume Kilpatrick cites for her information about Āzād constituted my first engagement with this scholar (Brustad et al. 2001).¹³

Āzād Bilgrāmī¹⁴

Although he is well-known to *Indian* Arabists and Indianists who use Arabic,¹⁵ Arabists generally have shown little awareness of Āzād or other Arabic littérateurs.¹⁶ Al-Sayyid Mir Ghulam ‘Alī “Āzād” b. al-Sayyid Nuḥ al-Ḥusaynī al-Wāṣiṭī (al-) Bilgrāmī was born in 1116/1704 into a respected family of scholars and civil servants in Maydanpura, Bilgram, an area about fifty miles north-west of Lucknow.¹⁷ Much

information about Āzād's life he himself supplies in notices in the *Subḥat al-marjān*, and the Persian *Ma'āsir al-kirām* and *Sarv-i Āzād*.¹⁸ He studied Arabic and religion with the renowned Mīr Ṭufayl Muḥammad Atraulī (d.1151/1738), prosody and the literary arts with his maternal uncle, Mīr Muḥammad Bilgrāmī (d.1185/1771), and Hadith, Sīra and Arabic and Persian poetry with his maternal grandfather, Mīr 'Abd al-Jalīl Bilgrāmī (d.1137/1725), whom he followed to Delhi in 1134/1721–1122. Though he would not write the *Shifā' al-'alīl* till late in his life, the foundations for a deep knowledge of Arabic poetry, rhetoric and lexicography were laid in this early period.

Āzād returned to Maydanpura in 1136/1724 and became a disciple of the Chishti Sufi Mīr Sayyid Luf Allāh (d.1142/1730). In 1141/1729, Āzād's uncle summoned him to Sīwistān where he substituted for him as Pay-Master General, a post he then assumed. While there, he began a work in Persian that he continued in Allahabad (having resigned his post) between 1147/1734 and 1150/1737. In Rajab 1150/October 1737, he left home and family with the intention of performing the Ḥajj. He left in secret, fearing his family's opposition to his departure in troubled times. He walked south and when he reached the Deccan was introduced to Āṣaf Jāh, who granted his wish, expressed in Persian verse, for help in performing the pilgrimage.¹⁹

Āzād reached Arabia in Muḥarram 1151/May 1738, where he was received by his compatriot, the poet Muḥammad Fākhīr "Zā'ir" Ilāhabādī (d.1163/1750). Having missed that year's annual pilgrimage, he studied Hadith with al-Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī (d. after 1163/1750) in Medina, and with the Egyptian Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ṭanṭāwī (d.1157/1744) in Mecca; the latter greatly admired Āzād's poetic talents.²⁰ Āzād probably began (but did not complete) his first Arabic prose work at this time, *Ḍaw' al-darārī fi Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* ('The light of abundant lamps: a commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī'), which Āzād modelled somewhat on a commentary by al-Qaṣṭallānī (d.923/1517).

Āzād returned to India in Jumādā II 1152/September 1739, having visited Sufi shrines in Ṭā'rif and Mukhā along the way. In Dhū l-Qa'da 1152/February 1740 he left for the Deccan at the invitation of Āṣaf Jāh but, finding a library of great interest at Aurangabad, instead took up residence there, near the shrine of Bābā Shāh "Musāfir" Naqshbandī (d.1126/1714). Nāṣir Jang summoned Āzād to his court in Hyderabad in 1158/1745, but when Nāṣir Jang died in 1164/1750, Āzād returned to Aurangabad, travelling only once to Hyderabad in 1168/1754 for a year. Thereafter, he remained in Aurangabad, studying, teaching and writing, and steadfastly refusing any official patronage. He is buried in Khuldabad.

A highly regarded poet, Āzād's widely known panegyrics of the Prophet Muḥammad also earned him the honorific, 'Ḥassān-i Hind' (*Ar. Ḥassān al-Hind*), likening him to the Prophet own panegyrist, Ḥassān b. Thābit.²¹ His poetry found its way into curricula in Arabic education in India. One *qaṣīda* appears in Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Yamanī al-Shirwānī's (d.1256/1840) *Nafḥat al-Yaman fimā yazūlu bi-dhikrihi al-shajan*.²² The *Nafḥa*, 'for close on a century a text-book for the Higher Standard and High Proficiency, Arabic, was first published in 1811';²³ and in 1857, the *Nafḥat al-Yaman* joined four other works as part of the Indian Arabic 'Literature' curriculum, namely the *Sab' Mu'allaqāt*, the *Dīwān* of al-Mutanabbī, the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī and the *Ḥamāsa* of Abū Tammām.²⁴ Noteworthy is the fact that the first printed edition of al-Mutanabbī's *Dīwān* in its entirety was published in Calcutta in 1230/1815, and edited by this same al-Shirwānī.²⁵

*Āzād Bilgrāmī's Arabic Works*²⁶

Āzād Arabic works consist of the following (in alphabetical order):

Araġ al-ṣabā fi madḥ al-Muṣṭafā

In manuscript: Salar Jung Museum

Ḍaw' al-darārī fi sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī

In manuscript: Nadwat al-'Ulamā'

Dīwān Āzād

- *al-Dīwān al-awwal*, Hyderabad, Deccan: Maṭbū'at Kanz al-'Ulūm, n.d.;
- *al-Dīwān al-thānī*, Hyderabad, Deccan: Maṭba'at Lawḥ Maḥfūz, n.d.;
- *al-Dīwān al-thālith*, Hyderabad, Deccan: Maṭba'at Kanz al-'Ulūm, n.d.;
- *al-Dīwān al-rābi'*: In manuscript: Nadwat al-'Ulamā';
- *al-Dīwān al-khāmis*: In manuscript: Nadwat al-'Ulamā';
- *al-Dīwān al-sādis*: In manuscript: Nadwat al-'Ulamā';
- *al-Dīwān al-sābi'*, Hyderabad, Deccan: Maṭbū'at Kanz al-'Ulūm, n.d.;
- *Mukhtār Dīwān Āzād al-ma'rūf bi-l-Sab'a al-sayyāra*, lith., Lucknow: Maṭba'at Āsī, 1900;
- *al-Dīwān al-thāmin*: In manuscript: Nadwat al-'Ulamā'; 'Ārif Beg Library, Medina;
- *al-Dīwān al-tāsi'* [= *Tuḥfat al-thaqalayn*]: In manuscript: British Library;
- *al-Dīwān al-'āshir*: In manuscript: Khuda Bakhsh Library, Patna; Nadwat al-'Ulamā';
- *Dīwān Āzād*: In manuscript: OMLRI, Hyderabad;

Kashkūl

In manuscript: OMLRI, Hyderabad

Mazḥar al-barakāt

Mazḥar al-barakāt, ed. Muḥammad Faḍl al-Dīn, doctoral thesis, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1980

Mir'āt al-jamāl

Included in: Nawwāb Ṣiddīq Khān (d. 1890), *Nashwat al-sakrān*

al-Sab'a al-sayyāra

See *Dīwān* earlier

Shamāmat al-'anbar fimā warada fi l-Hind min Sayyid al-Bashar

[= part 1 of the *Subḥat al-marjān*: see later]

Shifā' al-'alīl

Partial uncritical edition: *Shifā' al-'alīl fi iṣlāḥāt 'alā abyāt Abī l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī*, ed. N. A. al-Fārūqī, in *Thaqāfat-ul-Hind*, vol. 35, nos 3–4 (1984), pp. 60–106; vol. 36, no. 1 (1985), pp. 63–117

On the manuscripts, see later.

Subḥat al-marjān fī āthār Hindustān

Subḥat al-marjān fī āthār Hindustān, lith. Hyderabad, 1885–1886.

Critical edition: *Subḥat al-marjān fī āthār Hindustān*, ed. Muḥammad Faḍl al-Raḥmān al-Nadwī al-Sīwānī, 2 vols, Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 1976–1980.

Extract in English translation: 'India as a Sacred Islamic Land', trans. Carl Ernst, in Donald S. Lopez, Jr (ed.), *Religions of India in Practice*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 556–564.

Tasliyat al-fu'ād fī qaṣā'id Āzād

Tasliyat al-fu'ād fī qaṣā'id Āzād, lith. Bombay 1303.

[=Part 3 of *Subḥat al-marjān*: see earlier]

Āzād's first complete Arabic work was the four-part *Subḥat al-marjān fī āthār Hindustān* ('The coral rosary on Indian antiquities [lit. traditions]').²⁷ Its date of final collation was 1177/1763–1764, but parts were written earlier.²⁸ Part one, *Shamāmat al-'anbar fīmā warada fī l-Hind min Sayyid al-bashar* ('The scent of ambergris on everything the leader of humanity [Prophet Muḥammad] said about India'), a disquisition on the eminence and pre-eminence of India, was completed in 1164/1750.²⁹ The second section consists of forty-five biographies of Arabic scholars in India, and was intended to introduce eminent Indian scholars writing in Arabic to scholars outside India. The third section of the *Subḥat al-marjān* concerns rhetorical figures in Sanskrit and Arabic poetry. This is significant as few Indian scholars of Arabic evince knowledge of Sanskrit or of Indian poetics. This section was earlier written for the *Tasliyat al-fu'ād fī qaṣā'id Āzād* ('The heart's solace: Āzād's poems').³⁰ The fourth section describes types of lovers and beloveds. The *Mir'āt al-jamāl* ('The mirror of beauty'), which dates from 1187/1773, takes up the same themes in one hundred and five verses.³¹

Āzād wrote ten collections of poetry, seven of which form *al-Sab'a al-sayyāra* ('The orbiting seven'), eight of which date from between 1194/1779 and 1198/1783. For these poems, many of which are panegyrics of the Prophet Muḥammad, Āzād uses several verse forms, some traditional Arabic ones, such as the *qaṣīda* (ode) and *ghazal* (love lyric) but also others from Persian, such as the *rubā'ī* (quatrain). Al-Sīwānī numbers Āzād's verses at 12,500. In the 3700-couplet ethico-mystical (but also humorous and satirical) *Mazḥar al-barakāt* ('The repository of blessings'), which can be dated to 1194–1196/1780–1782, namely the same period, Āzād uses the Persian *masnavi* form.³²

The *Shifā' al-'alīl*

*The manuscripts*³³

I am aware of four manuscripts of the *Shifā' al-'alīl*.

- (1) OMLRI (Āṣafiyya) *Dawāwīm* MS 1113 (Figure 1). This bound manuscript of the *Shifā' al-'alīl*, preserved in the Government of Andhra Pradesh Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute in Hyderabad, is the one commonly referred

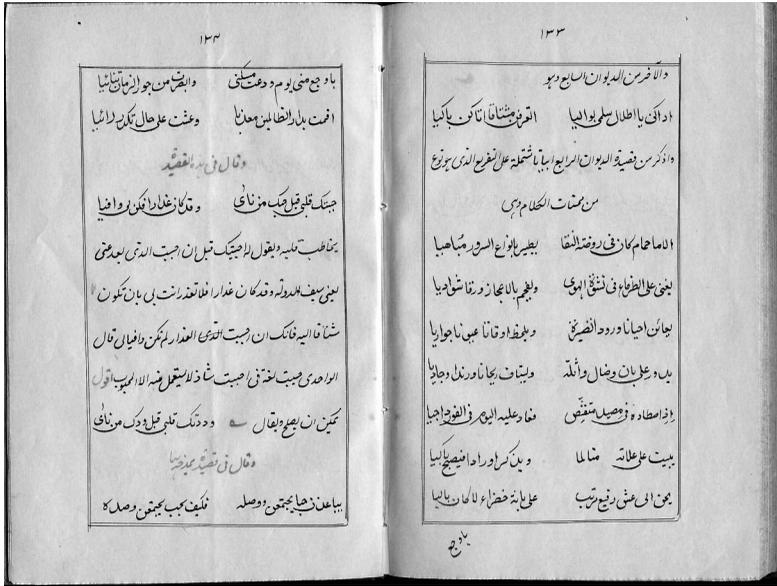


Figure 1. Pages 133–134 of Dawāwīn MS 1113.

to as the Āṣafiyya manuscript. It consists of seventy-two folios (143 pages), each 20 cm × 13 cm. Each page has eleven lines in a clear Nasta‘liq script, in black and red ink. The manuscript dates from no later than the early nineteenth century but the colophon bears no date, and the copyist is unidentified. It may be that it is in Āzād’s own hand; certainly, the hand in this manuscript, and in Salar Jung MS Arabic 29 (see later), are very close. The difficulty is that the heading on the first page identifies the work as Āzād’s and follows his name with *rahimahu llāh*, ‘May God show him mercy’.³⁴ It may be that the heading is by another hand: this requires further investigation. This is the manuscript reproduced in facsimile, and thus the only one to make the *Shifā’ al-‘alīl* available in its entirety.

- (2) Salar Jung Museum MS Arabic 29 (Figure 2). This manuscript, in the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, is seventy-nine folios, 19.4 cm × 11.8 cm, eleven lines per page, in clear black Nasta‘liq. There are numerous corrections that suggest it is in the author’s own hand. The manuscript bears the seal ‘Munīr al-Mulk, 1206’. Munīr al-Mulk was Prime Minister to Sikander Jah, the Nizam of Hyderabad from 1808 to 1832, and the grandfather of Salar Jung (d.1949), Prime Minister to the seventh Nizam of Hyderabad and founder of the Salar Jung Museum. The Hijrī year 1206 corresponds to 1791 AD.
- (3) Salar Jung Museum MS Arabic 30 (Figure 3). This manuscript is forty folios, 25.2 cm × 15.2 cm, nineteen lines per page, in clear black Nasta‘liq. It has very few corrections, bears the author’s own seal, ‘al-Faqīr Āzād’, and its hand is very similar to that of MS 29. It is almost certainly the author’s own hand.
- (4) Nadwat-ul-‘Ulāmā’ al-Adab al-‘Arabī MS 40 (Figure 4). This manuscript is fifty folios, 55 cm × 28.5 cm, twenty-five lines per page, in black and red Nasta‘liq. It was copied by Sayyid Nūr al-Ḥasan Qannawjī (d.1336/1917).³⁵

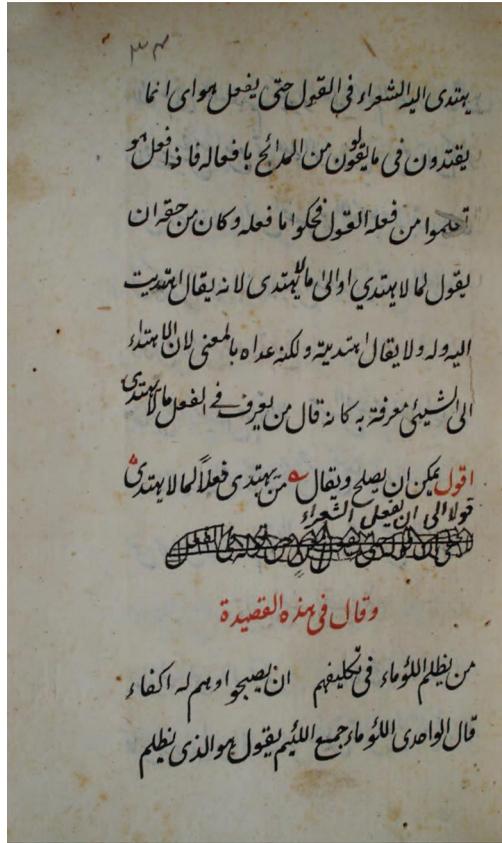


Figure 2. Page 34 of Salar Jung MS 29.

I have not been able to locate the manuscript described by Suhrawardy and Ahmad as part of the M. 'Alī Husain Library, Kūchah-i Madrasah-i A'izza, Hyderabad, and consequently cited by Husain and Abbas both, but since Suhrawardy describes it as having 'copious marginal notes', it may well be that the Salar Jung Museum acquired it and that it is identical to MS 29.³⁶

The title

Scholars have almost invariably made reference to the the *Shifā' al-'atīl* by an expanded title. There is, however, no evidence (or consensus³⁷) on this longer title. M. G. Zubaid Ahmed calls the work *Shifā' al-'atīl fī iṣlāḥ kalām al-Mutanabbī*, perhaps following the identification provided by Suhrawardy.³⁸ Al-Fārūqī calls the work *Shifā' al-'atīl fī iṣlāḥāt 'alā abyāt Abī l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī*,³⁹ this is an extrapolation, apparently inspired by the entries in the Salar Jung catalogue, which read *Shifā' al-'atīl fī iṣlāḥāt kalām al-Mutanabbī al-ḍillīl*. The use of *iṣlāḥ* is preferable to *iṣlāḥāt*, both in meaning and in that it corresponds to Āzād's procedure in the work, to improve/emend/correct/repair/remedy al-Mutanabbī's lines, which, as he puts it, *yumkin an yuṣlah wa-yuqāl*, 'It is possible for it to be remedied and have it say'.⁴⁰ In the introduction to the work, Āzād writes, *wa-jama'tu hādhihi*

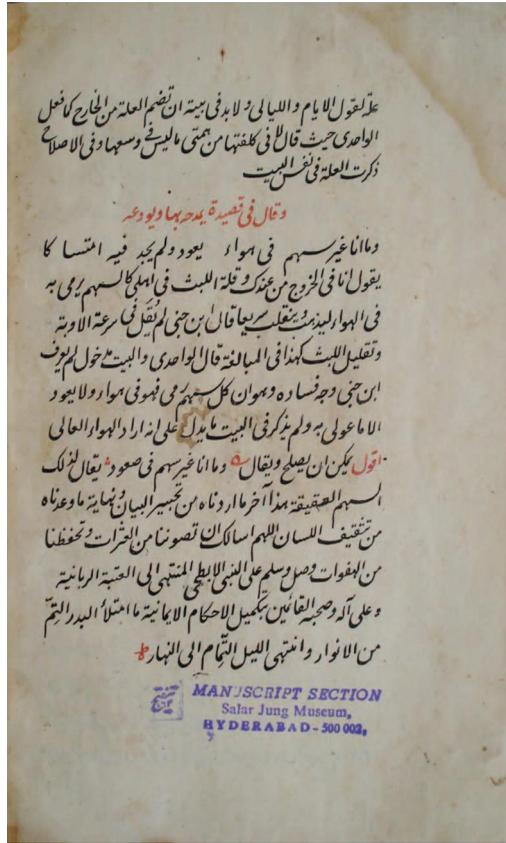


Figure 3. Folio 40 of Salar Jung MS 30.

al-risālah allatī sammaytuhā Shifā' al-'atīl . . . , 'I put together this treatise which I have titled *Shifā' al-'atīl* . . . ' tout court.

The title *Shifā' al-'atīl* is not unique to Āzād,⁴¹ though he appears to be the only scholar to apply this title to a work about al-Mutanabbī. The Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute itself has two other works bearing this exact title: a seventeenth-century Persian work on medicine (MS Ayurveda 79) and a nineteenth-century Urdu translation of Shāh Walī Allāh's *al-Qawl al-jamīl* (MS Urdu 1845). Āzād would have no doubt been aware of works with the title *Shifā' al-'atīl*. Of particular interest, however, is the fact that the title appears in works by contemporaries: (1) Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-Jarrāhī (d.1162/1749), *Shifā' al-'atīl fī dawā'* *al-kalīm*;⁴² (2) Diyā' al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Ibrāhīm Thamīnī (d.1808), *Kitāb al-Nīl wa-shifā' al-'atīl*;⁴³ (3) 'Abd al-Qādir (al-) Rāfi'ī (d.1815), *Shifā' al-'atīl fī madḥ Ṭahā al-jalīl*;⁴⁴ (4) Muḥammad Amīn b. 'Umar Ibn 'Ābidīn (d.1836 or 1842), *Shifā' al-'atīl wa-ball al-ghatīl fī ḥukm al-waṣīyya bi-l-khatamāt wa-l-tahātīl*.⁴⁵ The copy of the anonymous sixteenth century *Shifā' al-'atīl wa-siqā' al-ghatīl*, in the Khuda Bakhsh Library [which is a commentary on *al-Maqṣad al-jamīl fī 'ilm al-Khatīl* of Ibn al-Hājib (d.1248)], was copied ca.1737, and may, therefore, also have been known to Āzād.⁴⁶

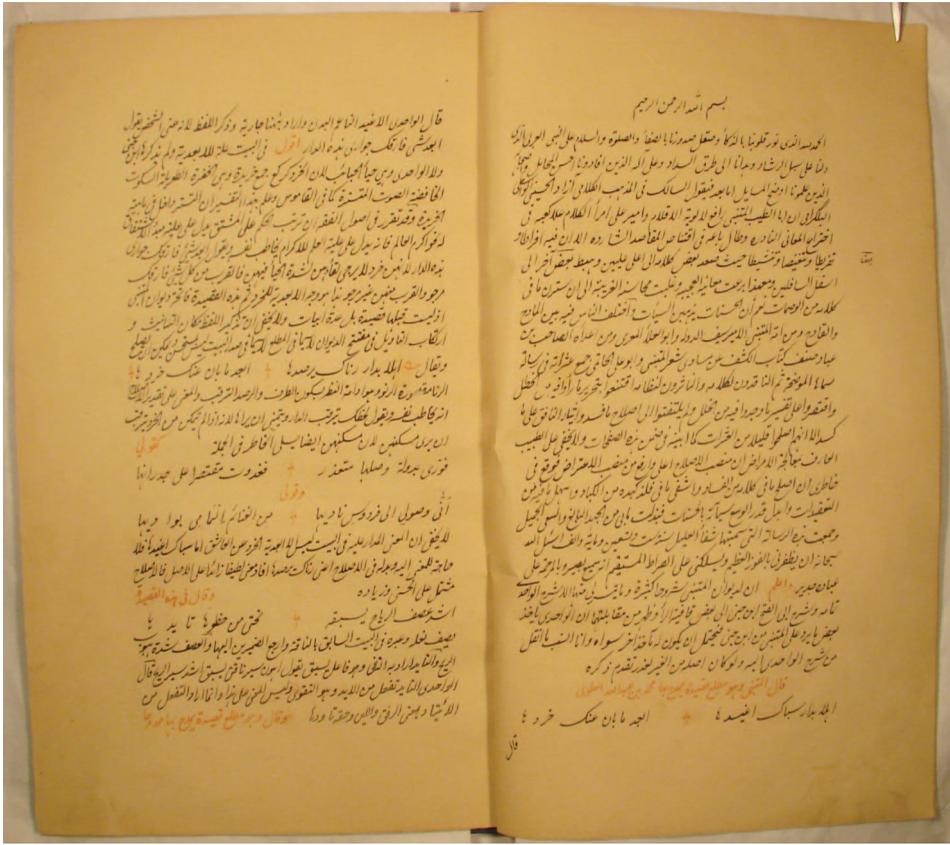


Figure 4. Folios 1b–2a of Nadwa MS 40.

The content

The *Shifā' al-'alīl* comprises Āzād's suggested improvements to one hundred and eighty of the poet al-Mutanabbī's linguistic and rhetorical choices.⁴⁷ Abū l-Ṭayyib Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbī (d.354/965) is widely regarded as (one of) the greatest of all Arabic poets.⁴⁸ He was born in Kufa (Iraq) in 303/915, where he also received his early education, and where his precociousness as a poet was already noticed. He practised his poetry in Kufa and Baghdad but met with little success. In c.320/932 he led a rebellion, which earned him imprisonment and also the name al-Mutanabbī, meaning 'he who professes to be a prophet'. Upon his release, al-Mutanabbī decided to try his hand as a panegyrist again. He travelled to Antioch, Damascus and Aleppo, choosing now to write poetry characterized by more inventiveness. In 337/948, al-Mutanabbī attached himself to the Ḥamdānid ruler of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla. At that prince's court, al-Mutanabbī made friends and foes, but the latter in time prevailed and al-Mutanabbī fled to Egypt in 347/957, where he was patronized by the Ikhshidid ruler, Kāfūr. Their relations soured and two years later, after satirizing his patron, al-Mutanabbī fled east. His next patron was 'Aḍud al-Dawla in Shiraz. In 354/965, while travelling to Kufa, al-Mutanabbī was attacked and killed, possibly by someone he had insulted.

Al-Mutanabbī had no shortage of enemies, but he had his champions too, both during his life and after his death. Inevitably, then, critics have fallen into two camps, those that praise his verse and those that denounce it, those that approve of his verse or who disapprove of it. What is more, critics have often had difficulty separating al-Mutanabbī's personality and political views from his poetry. Consequently, one of Arabic literature's greatest poets is also one of the most polemicized. In writing the *Shifā' al-'atīl*, then, Āzād inscribed himself into a particularly charged history. Āzād is, of course, fully aware of this, citing Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī as a supporter, and al-Šāhib Ibn 'Abbād (author of the *Kitāb Kashf 'an masāwī shi'r al-Mutanabbī*) and al-Ḥātimī (author of *al-Risāla al-Mūdiha*) as detractors.

In his introduction Āzād acknowledges al-Mutanabbī's greatness (*amūr 'alā umarā' al-kalām*) but acknowledges also that the poet sometimes overdoes (*ifrāt*) and is negligent (*tafrīt*).⁴⁹ All in all, Āzād has a balanced view of al-Mutanabbī's poetry, noting that some of his expressions rise to the heights and others sink to the lowest of the low.⁵⁰ Āzād goes on to explain his decision to write a work suggesting emendations to al-Mutanabbī's 'bad' choices by invoking the Qur'anic dictum, *Inna l-ḥasanāt yudhhibna al-sayyi'āt*, 'Good deeds eliminate bad deeds' (Q HŪD 11:114).⁵¹ Like a knowledgeable physician (*al-ṭabīb al-'arīf*), Āzād opts for cure (*'ilāj*) over remonstrance (*i'tirād*), observing that it occurred to him to emend what is defective in al-Mutanabbī's verses (*an ušliḥa mā fi kalāmihī min al-fasād*), in the hope that the bad will give way to the good.⁵² Much of Āzād's time is also consumed correcting the commentator al-Wāḥidī.⁵³ Sometimes, Āzād is ironic (suggesting al-Mutanabbī is *nā'im*, 'asleep' while writing, for instance) and harsh (describing the *bashā'a*, 'ugliness' of a verse, for instance).⁵⁴ But Āzād is also perfectly willing to be mistaken.⁵⁵ He is also willing to cite his own poetry, and quote it at length, to illustrate a point.⁵⁶ This is something he also does in the *Subḥat al-marjān*, listing, for example, thirty-eight figures of speech from Indian rhetoric and then providing a list of thirty-six that he has himself invented.⁵⁷

Āzād opens the work with a short introduction, which I translate later. I have opted to replicate the *saj'* that characterizes much of Āzād's prose, so the translation is not literal; paragraph breaks are mine.

In the name of God, Full of Compassion, Ever Compassionate.

All praise to God, Who illuminated our hearts with acuity, and burnished our breasts with clarity. And blessings and peace upon the Arab prophet who guided us on the roads of the humane, and who showed us to the paths of the germane; and blessings on his family, who benefited us with the dearest of demeanours, and taught us the clearest of matters.

To continue: The traveller on the scholarly path, Āzād al-Ḥusaynī al-Wāṣiṭī al-Bilgrāmī, asserts that Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī is the pre-eminent standard-bearer of the pen, a prince among writers and men, whose rank is elevated in unusual meaning inventions, and whose strength is celebrated in the gleaning of elusive intentions, except that he also displays negligence and immoderation, and disturbance and convolution, when some of his expressions rise as high as they can go, and when they then sink to the lowest of the low. All the while, his unusual excellences overwhelm to the point that the blemishes in his language

are concealed, indeed, 'good deeds eliminate bad deeds'. So opinion has differed, among those who appreciate, and those who calumniate. Among al-Mutanabbī's partisans are Prince Sayf al-Dawla and Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī and among his enemies are al-Ṣāhib Ibn 'Abbād, author of the 'Book of the Revelation of the Faults of Mutanabbī and Abū 'Alī al-Ḥātimī', who collected his false steps in an epistle he titled 'The Elucidating'.

Literary critics of his expressions, and authors describing his fashions, have contented themselves with recording what prattle they found, and confined themselves to commentating on the imperfections that abound, without turning their energies to correcting what was defective, and attempting to make the unsaleable more effective, only correcting a few of the stumbles, as I try to do within these pages most humble. It is well-known that the able physician undertakes to cure the ailing, and that the virtue of curing is greater and nobler than pointing out failings. It therefore occurred to me to correct what was defective in his art, and to cure the very sickness in his heart, and to smooth out all the complexity I could, and to change, to the extent possible, the bad into the good. Consequently I exerted strong effort and good striving, and put together this epistle which I have titled 'Cure for the Ailing', in this year 1196. I ask God, may He be exalted, to grant me victorious success, and to keep me on the straight path of righteousness; He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing, and shows his worshippers mercy befitting.

Know that there are numerous commentaries on the *Dīwan* of al-Mutanabbī and that I was only able to get access to al-Wāḥidī's in its entirety, and to Ibn Jinnī's up to the rhyme letter *rā'*. It is evident from a comparison of the two that al-Wāḥidī takes some of his reproaches of al-Mutanabbī from Ibn Jinnī, and it may well be that he takes from others too. I attribute what I cite from al-Wāḥidī to him: if it originates with another, then may attribution to him be excused.

Al-Mutanabbī says, in the opening line of a poem in praise of Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-'Alawī . . .

The 'ailing' lines by al-Mutanabbī chosen by Āzād and for which he suggests 'remedy' then follow.

Envoi

Given that Arabic and Muslim culture were losing ground in the late 1190s/1770s, Āzād's decision to write the *Shifā' al-'alīl* at an advanced age—he was eighty at the time—must be seen as his attempt to contribute to a revival of Arabic letters in India and perhaps also, as I have suggested elsewhere, as a plea for strong remedies all around.⁵⁸

A full evaluation of this fascinating late twelfth/eighteenth century Indian work will accompany the critical edition I am currently preparing. It is true that it is a commentary on al-Mutanabbī, and a super-commentary on al-Wāḥidī (and Ibn Jinnī and others), but it is, I believe, more than a backward glance from the 'age of decline' to a 'golden age'. It

is, rather, evidence of an accomplished and inventive poet in dialogue with one of his illustrious predecessors, someone who is a predecessor precisely because Āzād sees himself as part of the very same Arabic literary tradition.

Acknowledgements

I offer Roger Allen, an inspiring teacher and mentor, this preliminary article on the *Shifā' al-'alīl* as an addendum to the response I gave to the question, 'How decadent was "the period of decadence"?', which he set as part of my Master's examination in Arabic literature twenty years ago.

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Notes

1. Robert Irwin, *Night & horses & the desert: an anthology of classical Arabic literature* (London: Penguin, 1999), 448, reissued as *The Penguin Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006).
2. Margaret Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbi: Voice of the 'Abbasid Poetic Ideal* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 11–14.
3. See e.g. Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1907), 442–70.
4. See e.g. Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997). Cf. Shukri Fayṣal, 'Al-adab al-'arabī min suqūt Baghdād ḥattā awā'il al-naḥḍa', in *Al-Adab al-'arabī fī āthār al-dārisīm* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 1961), 292–3.
5. See Devin Stewart, 'Decadence: Notes and preliminaries' (2004), an unpublished position paper based on the deliberations of RRAALL (www.rraall.org), 2–3; cf. J. J. Saunders, 'The Problem of Islamic Decadence', *Journal of World History* 7 (1963): 701–20.
6. 'Umar Mūsā Bāshā, *Tārikh al-adab al-'arabī: al-'aṣr al-'uthmānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir; Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1989).
7. *Arabic literature of Africa*, ed. John Hunwick and R. S. O'Fahey (Leiden: Brill, 1994–): vol. 1, *The writings of eastern Sudanic Africa to c. 1900*; vol. 2, *The writings of central Sudanic Africa*; vol. 3, fasc. a, *The writings of the Muslim peoples of northeastern Africa*; vol. 4, *The writings of western Sudanic Africa*.
8. *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Cf. Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The development of its genres and criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
9. *Essays in Arabic Biography, 1350–1850*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2008), forthcoming.
10. Several decades ago, Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, rev. ed., 2 vols, 3 suppl (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1943–49) [hereafter *GAL*], recognised the need to acknowledge the geographical (and temporal expanse) of the Arabic and Arabophone world: for the period up to 1258, he divided the material by *literary genre*, but for the period after he did so by *region*.
11. *Histoire de la littérature arabe moderne, Tome 1: 1800–1945*, gen. ed. Boutros Hallaq and Heidi Toelle (Arles: Actes Sud, 2007).
12. Hilary Kilpatrick, 'Introduction' to 'L'État des lieux dans le monde arabe à la fin du XVIIIe siècle', in *Histoire*, ed. Hallaq and Toelle, 35.
13. Kristen E. Brustad, Michael Cooperson, Jamal J. Elias, Nuha N. N. Khoury, Joseph E. Lowry, Nasser Rabbat, Dwight F. Reynolds, Devin J. Stewart and Shawkat M. Toorawa, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, ed. Dwight F. Reynolds (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

14. This article reprises, and revises, my 'Introduction' to Ghulām 'Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Shifā' al-'alīl: Facsimile of MS Dawāwīn 1113 in the Government of Andhra Pradesh Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute, Hyderabad* (Hyderabad, Deccan: APGOML&RI, 2007), 1–17 (hereafter *Shifā'*).
15. 'Abd al-Hayy b. Fakhruddīn al-Hasanī (d. 1341/1923), *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir wa-bahjat al-masāmī wa-l-nawāzīr*, 2nd ed., 8 volumes in 6 (Hyderabad, Deccan: Dā'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1947–81 [1931–60]); *GAL* (1943–49); M. G. Zubaid Ahmad, *The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic Literature, from ancient times to 1857* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1968 [1946]); Annemarie Schimmel, *Islamic Literatures of India* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973, part of vol. 7 of *A History of Indian Literature*; Muhammad Yousuf Kokan Umari, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic, 1710–1960* (Madras: Department of Arabic, Persian and Urdu, University of Madras, 1974). See Ahmad, *Contribution*, 303, for a bibliography of early Indian works mentioning Āzād. See also the editor's 'Introduction', in Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Subḥat al-marjān fi āthār Hindustān*, ed. Fazlur-Rahman al-Nadwī al-Siwānī (Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 1980–86), vol. 1, 1–24, esp. 1–8; Hasan Abbas, 'Āzād Bilgrāmī ki Arabi khadamāt', *Ma'arif*, vol. 162, no. 3 (1998), 204–21; and Ghulām Zaqānī, *Ghulām 'Alī Āzād al-Bilgrāmī, musāhamatuhu fi ithrā' al-lughā al-'arabiyya wa-ādābiyā* (Delhi: Dār al-Kitāb, 2004).
16. E.g. *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature*, 2 vols, ed. Julie S. Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), where neither Āzād nor any other Indian Arabic belletristic authors have their own entries in an otherwise comprehensive work. Āzād also makes no appearance in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Allen and Richards. But see A. S. Bazmee Ansari, 'Āzād Bilgrāmī', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (1960), 808.
17. On the Bilgrāmīs, see al-Siwānī, 'Introduction', 3, and Zaqānī, *Ghulām 'Alī*, 28–31. Bilgrām and neighbouring areas, e.g. Qannawī, were home to numerous important Arabic scholars.
18. For Āzād's autobiographical passages, see: Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Subḥat al-marjān*, vol. 1, 298–309; *idem*, *Ma'āsir al-kirām, tārikh Bilgrām*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abdah Lā'īlpūrī (Lahore: Maktabah Ihyā' al-'Ulūm al-Sharqīyya, 1971), 161–64, 303–11; *Khazāna-ye 'Āmira*, lith. (Lucknow: Maṭba'a-ye Munshī Nawal Kishawr, 1287/1871, 123–45). See also 'Abd al-Hayy, *Nuzhat al-khawāṭir*, vol. 6, 208–13; al-Siwānī, 'Introduction', 1–7; Zaqānī, *Ghulām Alī*, 31–46; Toorawa, 'Introduction', in *Shifā'*, 3–5; *idem*, 'Āzād Bilgrāmī (29 June 1704–15 September 1786)', forthcoming in *Essays in Arabic Biography, 1350–1850*, ed. Lowry and Stewart.
19. On Āṣaf Jāh, see Yusuf Husain Khan, *The First Nizām: the life and times of Nizāmu'l-Mulk Āṣaf Jāh I* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963); and Joseph Charles Heim, 'Piety and Imperial Reform: Nizāmu'l-Mulk Āṣaf Jāh I and the Fate of Islam in Eighteenth Century Mughal India', *Muslim & Arab Perspectives, International Islamic Journal*, vols 5–11 (1998–2004), 5–18.
20. See John Voll, 'Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, an Analysis of an Intellectual Group in 18th-Century Medina', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38 (1975): 32–39.
21. Āzād is also a highly regarded Persian poet. For some lines translated into English, see Simon Digby, *Sufis and Soldiers in Awrangzeb's Deccan, Malfūzāt-i Naqshbandiyya* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 172–3.
22. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Yamanī (al-)Shirwānī, *Nafḥat* [also: *Nafahāt*] *al-Yaman fimā yazūlu bi-dhikrihi al-shajan* (Calcutta: College of Fort William, 1811; Beirut: Dār Āzāl li-l-Ṭibā'a wal-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 1985), 160–1.
23. *Nafḥatu 'l-Yaman = 'Breezes from Yemen', Part 1*, translated with critical and philological notes by D. C. Phillott, Secretary to the Board of Examiners (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1907), i.
24. See Jamal Malik, *Islamische Gelehrtenkultur in Nordindien: Entwicklungsgeschichte und Tendenzen am Beispiel von Lucknow* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 534; cf. 537.
25. See A. J. Arberry, *Poems of al-Mutanabbī: a selection with introduction, translation and notes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 151, for information about Indian editions of al-Mutanabbī's *Diwān*.
26. For information on these works see below; for information on the manuscripts, see Sayyid Wajahat Husain, 'Āzād Bilgrāmī', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters* 2, 123–25; *GAL, Suppl.*, 2, 600–1; Ahmad, *Contribution*, 303–4, 449–50, 473, 482; al-Siwānī, 'Introduction', 10–12; Abbas, 'Āzād Bilgrāmī ki Arabi khadamāt'; and my 'The Arabic MSS of Āzād Bilgrāmī's Works', in preparation, for which I am still compiling data on available manuscripts. For information about Āzād's Persian works, see Husain, 'Āzād Bilgrāmī', 125–29; C. A. Storey, *Persian Literature: A*

- Bio-bibliographical Survey* (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd.), vol. 1, pt 2, 855–67; Husain Abbas, ‘Āzād Bilgrāmī ki Fārsī khadamāt’, *Ma’ārif*, 159, no. 1 (1997): 46–55.
27. For a short passage in English, see ‘India as a Sacred Islamic Land’, tr. Carl Ernst, in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 556–64.
 28. Āzād translated the section on rhetorical devices into Persian, comparing Indic and Persian poetics. See Ghulām ‘Alī Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Ghazālān* [recte *Ghizlān*] *al-Hind: muṭāla‘a-i taṭbīqī-i Hindī va-Fārsī bi-inzīmām-i faṣṭī va-zan shināsī*. Ed. Sirūs Shamīsā (Teheran: Šidā-yi Mu‘āšir, 2003).
 29. Āzād’s interest in biography extended to Persian too. In 1752–53 he completed a two-volume biographical work on important figures associated with Bilgrām, the *Ma’āsir al-kirām*, the first volume of which he had begun in north India. He also wrote the two-part *Sarv-i Āzād*, ed. Abdullah Khan (Lahore: Dukhāni Rifāh-i ‘Ām, 1913), biographies of poets who died after 1000 AH (1591 AD). It includes 143 Persian poets and eight “Hindi” (Hindi and Urdu) poets.
 30. The closing discourse of the *Subḥat al-marjān*’s third section summarises the entire preceding discussion in a hundred-couplet poem modelled, he says, on those of Šafi al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. 750/1349), Ibn Ḥijja al-Ḥamawī (d. 837/1434), and others.
 31. The poem is reproduced by Nawwāb Muḥammad Šiddīq Ḥasan in *Nashwat al-sakrān fī ṣahbā’ tadhkār al-ghizlān*, ed. Bassām ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jābī (Limassol: al-Jaffān wal-Jābī; Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1998), 149–57.
 32. There is some analysis of Āzād’s poetry in Zarfānī, *Ghulām ‘Alī*, 90–133. For the *Maḥzar al-barakāt*, see the introduction to *Maḥzar al-barakāt*, ed. Muḥammad Faḍl al-Dīn, doctoral thesis, Osmania University, 1980.
 33. For access to these manuscripts, I am indebted to Prof. Jayadhir Thirumal Rao, Dr Rafat Rizwana and K. Shridhar at the OMLRI; to Dr A. N. Reddy, Dr Unyal and Dr Syeda Asfia Kauser at the Salar Jung Museum; to Prof. A. R. Kidwai (Aligarh) and Dr Naeem Urrahman Siddiqui at Nadwat-ul-Ulama; and to Dr D. K. Rana and Dr N. C. Kar at the National Manuscript Mission.
 34. *Shifā’ al-‘atīl*, MS *Dawāwīm* 1113, folio 2r, line 2.
 35. On Nūr al-Ḥasan al-Qannawjī, see ‘Abd al-Ḥayy, *al-I‘lām* [= *Nuzha*], vol. 8, 531–2.
 36. Suhrawardy and Ahmad, ‘Notes’, cxxiii.
 37. E.g. *GAL Suppl.* 1, 941, cites Suhrawardy and Ahmad, ‘Notes’, for *iṣlāḥ*, but *GAL Suppl.*, vol. 2, 600, cites it for *iṣṭilāḥāt*.
 38. Ahmad, *Contribution*, 473; Suhrawardy and Ahmad, ‘Notes’, 101.
 39. In *Thaqāfat-ul-Hind* 35/3–4 (1984), 60–106, and 36/1 (1985), 63–117.
 40. E.g. *Shifā’*, 57, line 2; cf. 67, line 2 (for *al-iṣlāḥ*).
 41. E.g. al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), *Shifā’ al-‘atīl fī uṣūl al-fiqh*; Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Maḥallī (d. 674/1275), *Shifā’ al-‘atīl fī ‘ilm al-Khalīl*; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), *Shifā’ al-‘atīl fī masā’il al-qaḍā’ wa-l-qadar*.
 42. See *GAL Suppl.* 2, 422.
 43. Published in Beirut, 1972–73.
 44. Published in Cairo, 1895–96.
 45. *Shifā’ al-‘atīl wa-ball al-ghalīl fī ḥukm al-waṣīyya bi-l-khatamāt wa-l-tahāliḥ*, Daiber Collection II, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo, MS 115; cf. *GAL Suppl.* 2, 773.
 46. See *Khuda Bakhsh Arabic Catalog*, vol. 20, 286, no. 2218. Cf. *GAL Suppl.* 1, 966.
 47. See Āzād, *Subḥat al-marjān*, vol. 2, 32, for an early comment on an error in a line by al-Mutanabbī.
 48. On al-Mutanabbī, see Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbī*, and the bibliography cited there (131–4).
 49. *Shifā’*, 2, line 9; 2, line 11.
 50. *Shifā’*, 3, line 2.
 51. *Shifā’*, 3, line 3.
 52. *Shifā’*, 3, line 10 to 4, line 3.
 53. *Shifā’*, 46, line 10.
 54. *Shifā’*, 13, line 4; 44, line 2.
 55. *Shifā’*, 40, line 8.
 56. *Shifā’*, 92, line 2; 122, line 8 to 124, line 10 (with commentary to 125, line 11); 132, line 8 to 134, line 2.
 57. *Subḥat al-marjān*, vol. 2, pp. 43–131, and vol. 2, pp. 132–238.
 58. Toorawa, ‘Introduction’, *Shifā’*, 12.

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